

The Bellbird

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From the editor

August is "quiet time" for birding in Costa Rica and Panama. Some resident species aren't singing as much as they did during April and May, other than a handful of shorebirds, wintering species have yet to arrive, and the rain has been steady in many parts of both countries. Nevertheless, there are benefits to visiting southern Central America at this time of year. When it's not raining, the cloudy weather results in higher bird activity, mixed flocks can be more impressive than other times of the year, and there are still hundreds of resident bird species to watch including hummingbirds, Resplendent Quetzal, antbirds, tanagers, and the list goes on. This being the low season, fewer people are in the parks and on the trails, and more deals are also available for lodging. If you are headed here for birding in August, don't worry, it's going to be a great trip!

Pat O'Donnell

App updates

Our most recent updates for the [Costa Rica Birds Field Guide app](#) and the [Panama Birds Field Guide app](#) were released during the earlier part of 2015. If you have the full version, make sure to update to the latest version for free at the same app store where the purchase was made.

Our apps are nearly ready for the next major update. We are in the final steps of testing, looking into additional features to improve the experience, and adding more images. Keep an eye on our Facebook page for information about the release date.

Birding tip of the month

Flycatcher Identification is All About the Beak

The Tyrannidae, or tyrant-flycatchers, are the largest bird family in the Americas. In Costa Rica and Panama, literally dozens of species occur, and a lot do look rather similar. Unlike tanagers and some other small birds, bright colors are not a hallmark of the flycatchers. Most species are clad in a combination of brown, gray, or olive with a subsequent dull appearance that becomes a quick source of frustration for many a birder.

However, to be honest, flycatcher identification in Central America is actually easier than putting a name on many of the small tyrant-flycatchers of the north. Although some are certainly difficult to identify, most are readily identified with a good look at the bill.

Although species like the Slate-headed Tody-Tyrant, Northern Bentbill, Yellow-olive Flycatcher, and Greenish Elaenia might look kind of similar at first glance, they do show differences in shape and other, more subtle differences in field marks. However, the easiest way to identify them (other than vocalizations) is by looking at the bill.



Greenish Elaenia.

Many flycatchers species are able to thrive in the same area because they forage in slightly different manners that help each species focus on different microhabitats and different types of prey. This is reflected by the shape of the bill, and is why a bentbill has a slightly curved beak, the tody-tyrant has a fairly long bill of medium width, the Yellow-olive has a wide bill, and the Elaenia has a shorter, narrow beak.



True to its name, the Eye-ringed Flatbill does indeed have a prominent, flat bill.

When you see a possible flycatcher, focus on the head and get a close look at the bill. Note the colors of the bill and shape and you will probably have enough information to identify the bird.

Featured Birding Site

Tapanti National Park, Costa Rica

Located just 30 to 40 minutes from Cartago, Tapanti features excellent middle elevation forest that hosts dozens of uncommon species. This is one of the best spots in Costa Rica for birds like Green-fronted Lancebill (along streams), Streaked Xenops, Rufous-breasted Antthrush, foliage-gleaners, Spangle-cheeked Tanager, antpittas, Back-bellied Hummingbird, and White-bellied Mountain-gem. Both barbets are also commonly encountered along with Slaty-capped Flycatcher, Tawny-capped Euphonia, Golden-browed Chlorophonia, Black-faced Solitaire, and Slaty-backed Nightingale-Thrush among other species. Birders that keep an eye on the sky also have a fair chance of seeing Ornate Hawk-Eagle and Barred Hawk.



Looking up at the burnt orange colors of a Spangle-cheeked Tanager in Tapanti National Park.

Tapanti is a wonderful place to bird when staying at Rancho Naturalista or as a one or two day stop en route to the high elevation forests of Cerro de la Muerte. Although the park doesn't officially open until 8, and is popular among locals on weekends, a visit is always productive, and even if there weren't any birds (and there are many), it's a beautiful place for hiking through fantastic cloud forest bedecked with moss and orchids.



The forests of Tapanti.

To visit Tapanti National Park, drive through Orosi, and continue south, watching for signs to the park. The park is open from 8 to 4 but if you speak with the park manager for early entrance the day before, you might be able to go in around 6. If not, the birding can still be very good just outside the entrance to the park.

After entering, birding is excellent along the main road, and forest interior birds are more likely on any of three trails; the steep Arboles Caidos, the fairly easy Oropendola, and the moderate Waterfall/Pavas. Two small restaurants are also available within two kilometers of the national park; Kiri Lodge, and Los Maestros Restaurant.

App Tips

See the field marks for a species by touching the “i” icon in the upper right corner. This reveals the field marks and other information about a given species.

Search for birds by name.

If you know that you saw a hermit but aren't sure about the species, go to the top of the screen (above "A" for example), and touch the search bar. After the keypad appears, type in "hermit". This will result in any bird species with "hermit" in its name.



Searching for species with "sand" in name.

Study birds by group.

When you study birds by family or group, it makes it easier to recognize an antbird or antshrike when you see one, and helps you become more familiar with woodcreepers and other unfamiliar neotropical bird families.

Three FAQs and Concerns

Where are the range maps? Touch the "range" icon in the upper left part of the screen to see range maps for the birds on the screen. A range map for a species is also shown under the information for that species.

Are updates free? Yes, so far, as long as you have purchased the app, all of our updates are free.

Why are there other sounds in the background of some recordings? Quite often, birds sing or vocalize at times of the day when other birds are also singing. Many times, it can be difficult or impossible to not record other sounds even with a focused microphone. However, we still try to filter out other sounds and birds when possible. In cases where we haven't done that, the bird in question is the most obvious sound, and the background noises also reflect how one usually hears that particular species.

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